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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2016

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SUBJECT: "LADIES IN WHITE" WEBSITE LAUNCHED

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Buddy Williams for Reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) A new, polished website on Cuba's "Ladies in White" was launched on December 18, produced by the NGO Spanish Solidarity With Cuba. The professionally crafted website (www.damasdeblanco.com), created with the Ladies' permission, describes the group's genesis (in April 2003, following the "Black Spring" crackdown), objective (freedom for political prisoners) and activities (including post-mass marches outside Havana's Santa Rita church). The site identifies 40 Ladies by name, photo and cause, but key member Miriam Leyva is not among them. (Leyva, wife of conditionally probationed 75er Oscar Espinosa Chepe, has clashed with other leading "Damas" recently.) The website invites supporters to provide medicine to Ladies whose jailed husbands, sons or brothers are suffering from poor health. It also provides news and links to other Cuba-focused groups.

COMMENT

12. (C) The website will raise awareness that 59 of the 75 peaceful activists rounded up in Spring 2003 remain behind bars and are subject to mistreatment. The website will also infuriate Leyva and irk dozens of "Dama supporters," who march frequently with the Ladies out of solidarity. The group, a key force of defiance to the regime, is already reeling from internal squabbles, including one over who can speak for the Ladies.

13. (S) Leading Lady Laura Pollan told us on December 12 that when Fidel Castro dies, the group will likely gather at Revolution Square and hold a public demonstration "until they free our husbands or throw us in jail." If Fidel doesn't die earlier, Pollan said, the group will likely hold the special demonstration on March 19, the fourth anniversary of the Black Spring crackdown.

WILLIAMS